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Oxford Democrat.

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THE STORY TELLER.

From Chamber's Miscellany.

Story of Catherine of Russia.

The day had closed, and the snow fell heavily,

as the pastor Skovronski, returning from a visit

to his sister, who lived a short distance from

Marburg, reached the skirt of the wood sur-

rounding the town of that name. The cries of

a child attracting his attention, he stopped his

horse; but the voice of the wind rushing through

the trees could alone be heard, and he proceeded

on his way, believing that he must have been

mistaken. Suddenly the horse stood still, and

no crying or sobbing on the part of the pastor

could induce him to proceed. Supposing it was

some obstacle hidden by the darkness of the

night, he dismounted, and tried to force the

animal forward; but his efforts were unavailing.

He then perceived a slight deviation in the snow

at the horse's feet, and, stopping, down he found

it to be a half frozen child wrapped in linen.

Taking it in his arms, he found that it was still

alive. This accounted for the cries which he

had just heard. He anxiously endeavored, de-

spite the darkness of the night, to discover those

who, from misery or other causes, had thus aban-

doned their offspring in a desert place, covered

with snow; but neither seeing nor hearing any

one, the venerable pastor exclaimed in a loud

voice, "If you who have deserted this child can

now hear me, be in peace. In the name of the

Great Being whom I serve, I promise that hence-

forth this child shall be my care."

Remounting his horse, with the child wrapped

in his cloak before him, he quickened his pace,

and soon arrived at his humble dwelling, though

much later than usual.

"Mercy on me, Monsieur Skovronski, what

could delay you until this hour?" said an old

woman, as she advanced to hold the bridle while

he alighted. "I have been imagining all kinds

of misfortune to you, my sister Alexina was ill,

that Blaska had fallen lame, or that you had

been attacked by the Czar's soldiers."

"Take this infant, Frederika," said the pastor,

interrupting the old woman, and placing the child

in her arms.

"Surprise rendered her mute for an instant;

but like a torrent which has overflowed its banks,

her words soon found utterance, as she exclaim-

ed with vehemence, "What infant, monsieur—

an infant! And where have you found it? What

are we to do with an infant in this house? Who

is to take care of it? Who is to nurse it?"

"You, Frederika," quietly replied the old man

as he followed her into the house.

"What a beautiful little girl, monsieur! It

can scarcely be a year old. See, as she opens

her large black eyes, with what astonishment

she looks around her!"

The old pastor smiled, and placing some more

logs on the hearth, and looking after the comfort

of his little charge, he commenced his fragrant

supper, during which he recounted to the old

woman the manner in which he had discovered

the infant.

"How strange, monsieur, that Blaska should

have refused to advance, if it was not a child?

"Hence a have a child instinct," replied the pas-

tor; "they may throw down a man or a child

dead or alive, lying in their path."

"And when you called out to know if any one

was there, did you see anybody?"

"No, no one," replied the pastor.

"Even her dress told nothing. It is fine, but

leaves no marks by which she might be known."

"Give me the calendar, Frederika. This is

St. Catherine's day, the 25th of November."

"We shall call her Catherine!"

The old woman smiled with the child, and soon

after the venerable pastor sought his pillow, and

enjoyed the deep sleep of a man conscious of having

performed his duty.

Early the next morning, it was known to all

in Marburg that their pastor had found a

child in the snow, and that he had adopted it.

The previous night a peasant, living in a cottage

at the edge of the wood, had been awake by the

noise of a heavy foot falling against the

door, but the fearful and drowsy man did not

stop to what it was. On getting up the next

morning, he found a soldier dead outside his

threshold. The pastor, hoping to discover

some clue as to the history of his protégé, visit-

ed the cabin where the soldier lay, but could

find no information concerning him; and the

only document which was found about his per-

son was part of a letter, in which some vague

allusion was made to the "children." The con-

struction of the worthy Skovronski was, that the

soldier had been overcome by the severity of

the cold, and must have laid the child down, be-

lieving, by some violent exercise, to warm his

freezing limbs. But under that innocent sky

which smiled down, and will not be

called into question, the pastor and carefully

preserved the fragment of the letter, and every

word, "children, dear children," occurred

in his mind, and he was not without hope

that some future time to identify the child.

From that time forward, however, he treated

her with the kindest and most affectionate

care, and so endeavored to banish the little

become, by her docility and sweet temper, that

perhaps, as years passed on, he ceased to regret

that the inquiries he made, whenever opportuni-

ty offered, failed to draw forth any information

concerning the dead soldier could have been, or

wonder at this, for war was raging the coun-

try, and the circumstance of an obscure indi-

vidual of the army being missing, when hun-

dreds and thousands were dying around them,

was one little likely to attract attention.

Your pastor away, and Catherine, grown a

little, beautiful girl, assisted Frederika in the

management of the household affairs. At night

she always sang cheerful songs for her adopted

father with a very sweet voice; and nothing was

found to disturb the smoothness of her happy

disposition, unless indeed we except two or three

occasions on which her father—so she always

called him—was visited by attacks of illness

which seemed to threaten his life. Then, in-

deed, her young heart was rent with sorrow. It

was on these trying occasions that prompted by

her deep affection, and perhaps instructed by

the experienced Frederika, she acquired a skill

as a nurse which was surprising in a mere child

—a skill which, under the influence of another

person of singular account, she proved in

action of our lives which is unimportant, or

may not in its consequences influence our future

life.

One day, when Catherine was about thirteen

years of age, the old pastor appeared restless af-

ter reading some letters which had been brought

to him, and calling Catherine, he said, "My dear

child, my sister Alexina is ill. She is often ill,

and I should wish to have you near

her for a short time."

"If such is your wish, my father, I shall go."

"Oh, how happy you ought to be, mademoiselle,"

said the messenger, "to have neither

ther, nor mother, nor family."

"You think so, Paul?" replied Catherine with

a look of scorn which she did not attempt to

conceal.

"Yes, mademoiselle; for you are not obliged

to break your heart by leaving them."

"And have you, then, left them there without

help—without prayers?" asked Catherine quick-

ly.

"What could we do, mademoiselle? The

bullets whistled about our ears, killing all they

reached."

The Cossack officer said the general was near

them, and bade her follow him. She rather

went before than came after him. On entering

the tent, the first person she saw was the young

man, seeing that he was not the chief, she threw

himself at the feet of the great general whose

name had been echoed far and near.

"A grace, general! for pity's sake, a grace!"

said she, raising her hands in the attitude of

supplication.

"What does the child want?" demanded the

general, turning to the officer who had conduct-

ed her to his presence.

"She requests to speak to you, general."

"It is true," replied Catherine. "I believed

my protector, my father—to be a prisoner; but

I have since learned that he is among the dead."

"The favor I ask is, to be allowed to seek for his

body, that it may be buried in the manner it

deserves. Oh, if you had known how good he

was!"

"The first person Catherine encountered on

leaving the tent was old Frederika, the pastor's

servant. "Come," said she, taking her hand,

"come, show me the place where you saw him

fall."

"Think not of such a thing, Catherine. Would

you go among the dead at this hour?"

"Remain, Frederika, if you have any fear—

I shall go alone; he may be yet alive."

"Let us go then," said the old woman; "it shall

not be said that a child had more humanity than

I had."

The night was dark, and it was with difficulty

they could see their way. When they had dis-

sided the town, they came upon a field covered

with the bodies of men and horses, while the

cries that arose told that many were still alive.

"Young girl, be seized with horror, and

stopped. "Oh, my God, guide me!" she ex-

claimed, and came to a halt. Suddenly she

heard footsteps following. "Who are you?"

cried, turning to some persons whom the dark-

ness prevented her from distinguishing, adding,

"You are, no doubt, like us, an unfortunate."

"You seek perhaps some friend—a brother. I

am your father, and perhaps he is dead! Oh!

why have you come without a light, as if I could

distinguish my benefactor in this terrible dark-

ness. Heaven guide me!"

"Wait for me; I shall soon return," said the

person who had followed them.

He soon appeared, carrying a lantern, and

Catherine recognized the stranger whom she had

first seen in the wood. The light discovered to

her, and dying, but covered with the dead

such a scene, she differently pursued her search,

Frederika being unable to recollect the spot

where she had seen her master fall. The stran-

ger followed in silence. Each moment the agi-

tation of the young girl increased, and the sick-

ening sights around her, joined to the fruitless

search, overcame her fortitude, and sinking on

the ground, she covered her face with her hands,

and wept violently.

"Catherine," said the unknown, "you have un-

deraken a task too much for your age and

strength; leave the search to me, and at daybreak,

when the dead are separated from the wounded,

I shall myself seek him with the assistance of

some of the inhabitants of the town, who will be

able to recognize their pastor, and perhaps he

may not be amongst the dead."

"What I have commenced I shall finish," said

